

March 3, 2025

Dear Committee Members:

As the Associate Professor and Coordinator of Art Education at West Virginia University, I serve as Katherine Skilling's mentor on her honors project, an 80-page resource book created to engage learners in hands-on art activities that foster imagination and enhance the teaching practices of school art educators. My role as Skilling's mentor was to guide her through producing a cohesive written book that would provide evidence of the need to add updated content into the art curriculum that engages students in the PreK-12 art classroom.

Skilling's research helped to solve a growing problem in today's art classrooms where students have little to no interest in learning (Pew, 2024). Not only is student engagement waning due to content that does not take the student individual personal interests into account or the advanced skills of the 21st century learner, but teachers also don't have the flexibility or time to change their lessons to address this problem. Using storytelling Kat's book takes a unique direction in helping to teach the basics of artmaking to disinterested learners. It also aims to shorten the amount of reading time spent on learning while visually engaging students through hand drawn imagery. This imagery includes dynamic shapes, pictorial representations of concepts, and a helpful narrator who guides the reader through the story.

As Kat's mentor, I served as an advocate to help channel her ideas, weaving ways she could effectively engage students in the K-12 classroom with this meaningful art-making project. Starting in SPR 2024, we met bi-weekly to discuss her project's theme and brainstorm the solutions this research intended to solve discussing ways she could use the resource book to engage students in arts-based activities. I reviewed each chapter and offered advice on how to create more meaningful imagery.

As a mentor I strive to allow students to take ownership of their knowledge while creating a positive learning environment and valued the ideas she had on how to best achieve this. Skilling's book will provide learners with an opportunity to grow socially and emotionally while developing new artistic skills and techniques. It was important because it allowed her as a future educator to help students use artmaking to create more meaningful lessons her students will be engaged in. This resource book will help better prepare students in PreK-12 classrooms to succeed in a learning environment by providing new curriculum that focuses less on content and more on critical thinking and problem solving.



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